

Tobyhanna arming Soldiers with medical computers

by Anthony Ricchiazzi
Editor

Soldiers are being equipped with computers that give new meaning to first aid.

Technicians in the Computer Service and Repair Branch are programming computers that allow medics and other medical personnel to diagnose and probably treat injuries ranging from snake bites to gunshot wounds.

The branch is part of the Command, Control and Computer Systems Division; Command, Control and Computer Systems/Avionics Directorate.

The computer system, called Medical Communications for Combat Casualty Care, or MC4, is actually a suite of ruggedized computer hardware and joint software being fielded to medics, field hospitals and other deployed medical units. MC4 enables deployed medical forces to record and share patient medical records from the battlefield to the United States, supplanting archaic paper-based methods.

It is a medical information management system for Army tactical medical forces, providing a comprehensive, life-long electronic medical record for all servicemembers and enhancing medical situational awareness.

"MC4 systems consist of hand-held computers, three types of laptops and two servers, plus peripheral components such as printers and memory cards for each type of computer," said Mark Cooper, electronics mechanic. "Our mission is to load software into the computers and servers, test them, and assemble the equipment in transit cases."

Headquartered at Fort Detrick, Md., MC4 is under the oversight of Program Executive Office Enterprise Information Systems, Fort Belvoir, Va.

Division chief Jerry Dougher said the mission started in January.

The AN/TYQ-105(V1) hand-held computer can be used by medical personnel to diagnose and treat injury in the field.

"Thousands of deployed medical personnel will have

these," said James Hummel, an electronic measurement equipment mechanic. "We load them with software that provides first aid information, including things like identifying different snake bites such as a rattlesnake, or treatment of injuries."

Medical personnel can also use the TYQ-105s to record, transmit and access a Soldier's medical information via synchronization with MC4 laptops.

"This will help in giving first aid faster," Hummel said. "The computers use a Windows XP environment, so it's easy to input data about an injured Soldier, which helps with performing field triage."

That data can be transmitted to an AN/TYQ-106, 107 or 108 laptop computer, then through an AN/TYQ-108 (V1) server to the Combat-Service-Support Automated Information Systems Interface (CAISI) via the Internet. The servers are stationed at Combat Support Hospitals where hundreds of MC4 laptops are in use and transmit data to and from the handheld and laptop computers as well as other medical data systems.

Depot technicians have programmed thousands of computers and servers, which have been fielded to medical personnel throughout Southwest Asia.

"The most difficult part of the mission is programming the servers, because they have the most complex software," Hummel said. "The handheld takes the least time to program. Fitting all the equipment into a transit case is also time consuming; it has everything needed, even cleaning fluids for the DVD player and other components. We've cut down our time to prepare a complete system."

Cooper explained that the experience they gained allows them to work faster and find better ways of completing the mission. For example, they found a way to load software onto the memory cards that dropped the time from seven cards in 45 minutes to less than a minute.

"We found that an older version of Windows is more efficient than the XP we were using," he said.

"We also had a Lean event and reorganized the shop,"

Dougher added. "The Lean techniques helped us cut the total time to prepare a complete system."

Dougher said Tobyhanna will also repair systems as they are returned from the field.

"Tobyhanna Army Depot plays a critical role in the MC4 mission," said Orlando Illi, MC4 Deputy Product Manager. "They provide a central location for systems integration, configuration and asset management – all of which help us field the most comprehensive Information Management/Information Technology medical system in theater to date."



Ed Voychuk programs an AN/TYQ-105(V1) handheld computer. Voychuk is an electronics mechanic in the Command, Control and Computer Systems/Avionics Directorate. (Photo by Steve Grzezdzinski)

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"That's why we're here," she said. "We're here to help these people have a better way of life."

The Soldiers say they're witnessing evidence of that better life throughout the country. "You see a lot of new buildings going up and police stations being built and improvements in the health-care system," said McCoy.

"It's getting better day by day," agreed Murphree. "But it doesn't all happen overnight."

Just as the rebuilding process after Hurricane Katrina is moving along more slowly than hoped in Murphree's hometown, he said it's going to take longer than people would like in Iraq too. Unlike southern Mississippi, Iraq has older technology that was neglected throughout Saddam's regime, he said.

"We're working with 20 years of neglect, so it's going to take time, but it's improving," he said.

Since liberating Iraq, the United States has helped the Iraqis build or repair aging sewage treatment plans for 5.1 million Iraqis and funded projects that have improved access to clean water for 3.1 million people.

These infrastructure improvements are important to

assuring that Iraqis have the basics that Americans take for granted - "a job, the ability to take care of their families and have a roof over their head and a safe place to live," Murphree said. And he said it's also a critical component to establishing a new, democratic government in Iraq.

McCoy said he was encouraged that nearly 11.9 million Iraqis, three-quarters of the country's population, turned out for the parliamentary elections in December. Since June 2004, when the coalition transferred sovereignty, the Iraqi people elected an interim government, drafted and ratified a constitution and elected a four-year, constitutionally based government.

"It's good to see people involved in their government and future," McCoy said. "I think it's great," agreed Murphree. "We're giving them the opportunity they want."

Just as during the fall of Baghdad, Allen said she still recognizes that the U. S. has much left to accomplish before its mission in Iraq is finished.

"There's still a ton of work to do, and we're not leaving anytime soon," she said. "But there's a lot of progress and it's a lot better than it was three years ago."

Memorial groundbreaking set for May

The Tobyhanna Veterans Council will break ground for its POW/MIA Memorial on May 18.

The ceremony will mark the next phase of the council's efforts to erect the monument at the depot to honor prisoners of war and those listed as missing in action. Following five years of fundraising, the council has received donations sufficient to construct the monument. With enough funds in place, the council offered to donate the memorial to the Army. Late last year, Secretary of the Army Francis J. Harvey accepted the offer. Fundraising continues in order to provide additional enhancements and improvements for the memorial, says Les Sharp, chairperson of the memorial committee. Sharp is an electronics-mechanic in the Command, Control and Computers/Avionics Directorate.

The groundbreaking is a significant milestone, says Sharp, an Army veteran of the Vietnam era. "Finally, a vision will begin to take on a physical presence, which will be a permanent tribute to a very special group of America's veterans, and their families, for the hardship and suffering they have endured, and which some continue to endure."

The memorial design features a star pattern within a 36-foot diameter circle. Points of the star will honor prisoners of war and missing in action from all of the nation's conflicts and every branch of the Armed Forces. Features of the monument will specifically recognize the major wars and conflicts from World War I to the Persian Gulf War. Plans call for modifying the site to accommodate POWs and MIAs from current and future wars.

The original concept for the memorial was developed by Tobyhanna Veterans Council member

David Tyree, also a Vietnam-era Army veteran and an electronics mechanic in the Communications Systems Directorate. The groundbreaking brings his design closer to reality. "This will be a lasting tribute to our veterans, and it will be a site for the men and women of the depot community to stop and remember the sacrifices our veterans have made."

For various giving levels, individuals or organizations can get engraved pavers in two sizes, benches and plaques denoting the branches of the Armed Forces and the nation's major wars. A flagpole, decorative lighting, benches and landscaping are other features planned for the monument.

Preparation of the site, across the street from the World War II memorial, will begin soon. Council member and retired depot employee Dave Pope, a prisoner of war in Vietnam, has volunteered to serve as the council's construction manager for the project, Sharp has announced.

The groundbreaking ceremony will be followed by construction of the monument with a planned dedication by National POW/MIA Recognition Day in September.

Depot commander Col. Tracy Ellis, and officers and members of the Veterans Council will take part in the ceremony, which begins at 5 p.m. An informal reception will follow at The Landing.

For more information, contact Les Sharp, X57767, or Caroline Jurosky, X56789.

There are an estimated 42,781 living American ex-POWs. More than 39,700 are World War II survivors, 2,400 from the Korea War, 601 are from the Vietnam War, one from Somalia and three from Kosovo. About 10 former American POWs die each day.